

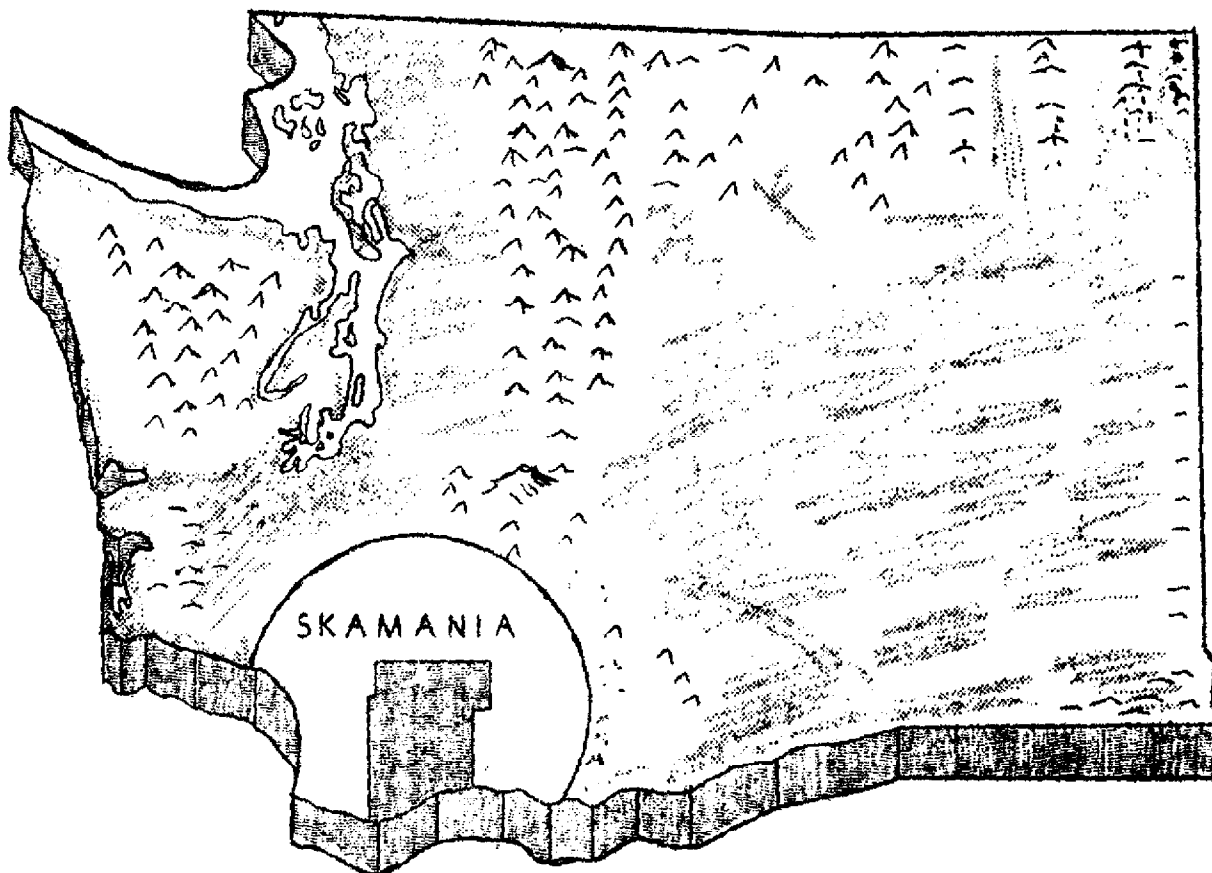
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SKAMANIA COUNTY

AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
1956



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Marketing Service
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WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE
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FOREWORD

This book on Skamania County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Swerre N. Ordahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Skamania County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Skamania County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Skamania County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1860 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Skamania County in 1854. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Lloyd J. Mercer, graduate student in Agricultural Economics, Washington State University and resident of Addy, Stevens County, wrote the sections on pattern of agriculture, crops, livestock and marketing and collected much original information. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold, D. W. Barrowman, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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PART I

History of Skamania County

Introduction

Skamania County, located in the southwestern portion of the state, lies entirely within the Cascade Mountains and is bordered on the south by the Columbia River Gorge. The main range of the Cascades bisects the county from northeast to southwest. The county is over 95 percent forested with more than 70 percent of the area included in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Only about two percent of the area is in farms, with about one-tenth of that total being cropped acreage. The agriculture of Skamania County is confined almost entirely to low benchlands along the Columbia and to the lower valleys of the White Salmon, Wind and Washougal Rivers.

Fruit farming has been the most important type of farming in Skamania County since pioneer days. Livestock farming is next in importance although forest products sold from farms are of almost equal value. Skamania ranks sixteenth among Washington counties in the production of fruits and nuts and ranks seventeenth in the sale of forest products from farms. Virtually no field crops are produced other than as feed for livestock. Total acreage devoted to crops has declined over the years principally because of the declining acreage devoted to the production of livestock feeds.

Today agriculture is far surpassed by lumber manufacturing as a source of income and employment. The county's 240 farms produced products valued at \$787,000 in 1954. Among Washington counties, Skamania ranks thirty-seventh in the value of farm products sold.

Skamania County has an area of 1,676 square miles, making it the twenty-fourth largest Washington county. The county's 1955 population was about 5,200. Population density is sparse with an average of only three persons per square mile.

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History 1/

The first white men to enter the present Skamania County area were members of the Lewis and Clark expedition which descended the Columbia River in November 1805. The Klickitat Indians were the main inhabitants of the area before the coming of the white man. These Indians were related in language and culture to the Yakima, Tenino, Umatilla, Cayuse and Nez Perce tribes who lived along the banks of the Columbia and its tributaries in southern Washington and northern Oregon. The Klickitats were horsemen who moved about over large areas. They wintered at fishing sites along southern Washington rivers and spent their summers moving about in the Cascade Mountains and plateaus hunting game and collecting roots and berries. They preferred the more open uplands of the interior to the brushier forests of the west slope of the Cascades. Although they ranged into Skamania County and camped along the Columbia River, they usually lived in parts of the present Klickitat County along the Columbia River gorge. Their favorite mountain food-gathering area was the Mount Adams district and the valley of the Klickitat River.

White settlement of Skamania County proceeded slowly. In 1825, the great British fur trading enterprise, the Hudson Bay Company, established the first permanent settlement at Fort Vancouver in Clark County. Travel by voyageurs on their way to the northern fur country represented the next phase in the white man's development of the country. Some of these Hudson Bay French and English traders and trappers stayed on to settle along the Columbia and its tributaries in northern Oregon and southern Washington. Permanent settlement was slowed because of joint occupation of the area by both the United States and Great Britain prior to 1846 and by the Indian Wars, 1855-1858.

Settlement did proceed despite these and other difficulties. The first American settlement was made at Upper Cascades in 1852. Settlers came by wagon train to take up donation land claims and to buy land at \$1.25 per acre. Skamania County was created from the eastern part of Clark County on March 5, 1854 by the Washington Territorial Legislature. It was the ninth county to be formed and was the first one with any portion of its area east of the Cascades. Skamania is an Indian word meaning "swift river" and refers to the swift currents of the Columbia River. The village of Cascades at the foot of Cascades rapids was chosen as the county seat.

1/ This historical summary has been derived from five sources:

- (1) Perry, Richard M., The Counties of Washington, Olympia, Secretary of State, State of Washington, 1943. (Mimeographed).
- (2) Malcolm Higgins, Skamania, (County History), pp. 141-143, The Book of Counties, 1953, a publication of the Washington State Association of County Commissioners and County Engineers in cooperation with the State College of Washington, 1954.
- (3) Fred Lockley and Marshall N. Dana, More Power to You. The Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, 1934.
- (4) Told By the Pioneers, Washington Pioneer Project, Works Project Administration Federal Project No. 5841, Vol. III, 1938.
- (5) The Coast, A Magazine of Town and Country Life. Seattle, Washington. October, 1910.

Mr. L. F. Iman, one of the first American settlers, came to Skamania County by ox-team in 1852. He built a water-powered sawmill near the present site of Stevenson. Using lumber from his mill, he and Mr. Shepphardson built the county's first schoolhouse on the Shepphardson claim. The town of Stevenson was laid out in 1893 on the Shepphardson donation land claim.

Growth of agriculture was very slow. Most of the population was employed in river transportation during the first few decades of the county's existence. The first steamboat on what is termed the Middle River was the James P. Flint, built at Cascades by D. F. and P. F. Bradford and Captain J. O. Van Bergen in 1851. The Flint was hauled over the Cascade rapids the next year and operated between the Upper Cascades and The Dalles. In 1862, the Oregon Steam Navigation Company built a portage railroad around the Cascade rapids on the Washington side of the river. W. R. Kilburn had built a portage road on the Oregon side in 1855.

Because of the heavy volume of river traffic during the steamboat era, there was much agitation for a canal and locks around the Cascade rapids. Work on this project was started in December 1878 and with many interruptions continued until November 5, 1896 when the locks were turned over to the government. Throughout this period a large part of the county's population was employed on this project and in producing the cordwood used for fuel on the river steamers. The county's population stood at 770 in 1890 compared with 130 in 1870.

Early settlers were generally interested in both lumbering and farming. The Wind River Valley area around Carson was settled in 1868. Although lumbering was a major industry, fruit production was started on a limited scale. The flow of settlers into the region increased in the decade between 1870 and 1880. This early rush was created by the Homestead Act of 1862 which granted 160 acres acres free. The Mt. Pleasant area in the southwest part of the county was settled by pioneers interested in farming and lumbering in 1878.

Stevenson became the county seat, but not without political maneuvering. County records were forcibly moved from the town of Cascades to Stevenson one night in 1893. Cascades was badly damaged by the great flood of 1894 so the county seat was left at Stevenson. According to L. F. Iman about 20 people lived in Stevenson at that time.

During the 1890's the county started to grow rapidly. Population more than doubled during that decade with 1,690 persons living in the county by 1900. Fruit production became an important enterprise. The Fruit Growers Union was formed at Underwood in the White Salmon Valley in 1898 with W. F. Cash as the first president. The group worked to develop the shipment of fruit from the area and to promote fruit production. Dairy and livestock farming also became more important during this period as the size of the local market increased. In 1905, the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railroad built a line through the county, greatly increasing the availability of outside markets. By 1910 the county had a population of 2,890 with the increase in settlement attributed to the growing agricultural production of the county and the increase in lumbering.

Skamania County's population declined from 2,890 to 2,360 between 1910 and 1920. Farms reached a new high of 246 in 1920 while land in farms dropped

to 26,000 acres compared with 40,000 acres in 1900. Dairy and fruit farming became the two most important farm enterprises. Milk production totaled 2,900,000 pounds with sales from farms being about 473,000 pounds. There were about 56,000 fruit trees in the county with apples (31,000) being the most important. Plums, prunes and pears were the other leading types of fruit grown.

Lumbering activity resulted in an increase in population to 2,890 by 1930. Agriculturally, the county remained about the same although some increase in farm numbers occurred. Construction of Bonneville Dam led to the next period of growth in the county. Work on the dam started in November 1933 and lasted about three years. The average number of men employed during construction was about 2,000. North Bonneville was established at the site to become one of the county's two principal towns. Skamania County's population rose to 4,630 by 1940.

During the decade of 1940-1950 Skamania County's agriculture changed at a rapid pace to a part-time basis. Many people lived on small farms in Skamania County and commuted to work in the industrial centers of Portland, Vancouver and Camas during World War II. Others worked in the forest industry while farming part-time. The county's population increased slightly during the decade, reaching 4,790 in 1950.

Lumber production almost doubled between 1950 and 1954, going from 28 million board feet to 52 million board feet in that period. As a result, the county experienced another period of growth with its 1955 population estimated at 5,200. Forest insect infestation, resulting in a speeding up of cutting in Gifford Pinchot National Forest, has been an important factor in the recent lumbering boom.

Farming in Skamania County in the 1950's consists largely of either part-time fruit farming or livestock farming. Considerable amounts of fruit are still shipped to nearby and eastern metropolitan areas. Production of dairy and poultry products for local consumption is also important. The sale of forest products from farms is increasing as a source of income.

Today the rural-farm population, numbering about 925 persons, operates 240 farms. Of these, 70 farms are operated on a commercial basis and 170 are part-time and residential farms with low incomes from sale of farm products. Value of farm property has increased and has reached a new high estimates at \$2,950,000.